

Protect Your Pet from Common Household Dangers

Many common household items can pose a threat to animal companions. Even some items specifically meant for pets could cause health problems.

To protect your pet, simply use common sense and take the same precautions you would with a child. Although rodent poisons and insecticides are the most common sources of companion animal poisoning, the following list of less common but potentially toxic agents should be avoided if at all possible.

Outside Hazards

- Antifreeze that contains ethylene glycol has a sweet taste that attracts animals but is deadly if consumed in even small quantities; one teaspoon can kill a seven-pound cat. The HSUS recommends pet owners use a safe antifreeze in their vehicles. Look for antifreeze that contains propylene glycol, which is safe for animals if ingested in small amounts. Ethylene glycol can also be found in common household products like snow globes, so be sure to keep these things out the reach of animals.
- Cocoa mulch contains ingredients that can be deadly to pets if ingested. The mulch, sold in garden supply stores, has a chocolate scent that is appetizing to some animals.
- Chemicals used on lawns and gardens, such as fertilizer and plant food, can be easily accessible and fatal to a pet allowed in the yard unsupervised.
- De-icing salts used to melt snow and ice are paw irritants that can be poisonous if licked off. Paws should be washed and dried as soon as the animal comes in from the snow. Other options include doggie boots with Velcro straps to protect Fido's feet, and making cats indoor pets.

Trouble On The Inside

- Cedar and other soft wood shavings, including pine, emit fumes that may be dangerous to small mammals like hamsters and gerbils.
- Insect control products, such as the insecticides used in many over-the-counter flea and tick remedies, may be toxic to companion animals. Prescription flea and tick control products are much safer and more effective. Pet owners should never use any product without first consulting a veterinarian.
- Human medications such as pain killers (including aspirin, acetaminophen, and ibuprofen), cold medicines, anti-cancer drugs, anti-depressants, vitamins, and diet pills can all be toxic to animals. Keep medication containers and tubes of ointments and creams away from pets who could chew through them, and be vigilant about finding and disposing of any dropped pills.



- Poisonous household plants include azalea, dieffenbachia (dumb cane), lilies, mistletoe, and philodendron, among others.
- String, yarn, rubber bands, and even dental floss are easy to swallow and can cause intestinal blockages or strangulation.
- Toys with removable parts—like squeaky toys or stuffed animals with plastic eyes—can pose a choking hazard to animals. Take the same precautions with pets as you would with a small child.
- Rawhide doggie chews may be contaminated with Salmonella, which can infect pets and humans who come in contact with the chews. These kinds of chews should be offered to a pet only with supervision, as they can pose a choking hazard as well.

Kitchen Dangers

- Chocolate is poisonous to dogs, cats, and ferrets.
- Fumes from nonstick cooking surfaces and self-cleaning ovens can be deadly to birds. Always be cautious when using any pump or aerosol spray around birds.
- Leftovers such as chicken bones easily shatter and can choke a cat or dog. Other human foods to keep away from pets include onions and onion powder; alcoholic beverages; yeast dough; coffee grounds and beans; salt; macadamia nuts; tomato, potato, and rhubarb leaves and stems; avocados (toxic to birds, mice, rabbits, horses, cattle, and dairy goats); and anything with mold growing on it.

Safety First

The HSUS recommends that pet owners use all household products with caution and keep a pet first-aid kit (for dogs and cats) and manual readily available. The HSUS has a first-aid book in conjunction with the American Red Cross entitled *Pet First Aid: Cats and Dogs*. If all of your precautions fail, and you believe that your pet has been poisoned, contact your veterinarian or emergency veterinary service immediately. Signs of poisoning include listlessness, abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle tremors, lack of coordination, and fever.

In Case of Emergency

The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center operates a hotline 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 888-426-4435 for a fee of \$60 per case. If you call, you should be prepared to provide the name of the poison your animal was exposed to, the amount and how long ago; the species, breed, age, sex, and weight of your pet; and the symptoms the animal is displaying. You'll also be asked to provide your name, address, phone number, and credit card information.

Fatal Attraction: Antifreeze is a Sweet But Deadly Poison for Pets

Ethylene glycol, the main ingredient in almost all major antifreeze brands, has an inviting aroma, a sweet flavor. Its appealing smell and taste often tempt animals and children to drink the highly poisonous substance.

It only takes a few tablespoons of highly toxic antifreeze to seriously jeopardize an animal's life. Pet guardians need to know how to help keep antifreeze away from animals, as well as detect the early symptoms of antifreeze poisoning.

Prevent Antifreeze Poisoning in Animals

- Switch to a brand of antifreeze that contains propylene glycol instead of ethylene glycol.
- Keep antifreeze sealed and away from animals; clean up spills completely, and fix any leaks immediately.
- Don't allow your pet to wander unattended near driveways, roads, garages, or other places where she could come into contact with antifreeze.
- Keep other products that contain ethylene glycol—like paint, cosmetics and novelty snow globes—out of the reach of animals, as well as any product of which you are not certain of the ingredients.
- Monitor your pet for strange behavior. If you think she may have ingested antifreeze, take her to a veterinarian immediately.

Poison Prevention

To lower the risk to animals, consumers can switch to a brand of antifreeze containing propylene glycol, a chemical ingredient that is less toxic than ethylene glycol. In addition to being safer, propylene glycol has a bitter taste that makes it less attractive to curious animals. Although it's safer than ethylene glycol antifreeze, propylene glycol antifreeze is still toxic. To reduce the risk of poisoning, all brands of antifreeze should be handled carefully and treated as a highly poisonous substance.

Families can help save their own pet from an encounter with antifreeze by closely watching the animal in areas where antifreeze may be accessible, such as roads, driveways, or garages.

How To Detect Poisoning

For pets exposed to antifreeze, the first few hours are critical. Animals who receive immediate veterinary care can recover successfully—but the longer they remain untreated, the less likely they are to survive.

Antifreeze poisoning occurs in two phases. In the first phase, the animal typically appears lethargic, disorientated, uncoordinated and groggy. Symptoms usually appear 30 minutes to one hour after ingestion and can last for several hours.

The second phase, which can last up to three days, is characterized by symptoms such as vomiting, oral and gastric ulcers, kidney failure, coma and death.

Thousands of pets have suffered this preventable fate, prompting several states, and the federal government, to consider legislation that could drastically lower the incidence of antifreeze poisonings in both humans and animals.

Smart Solutions

Six states—Oregon, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Tennessee, and Maine—have successfully passed legislation requiring that a bittering agent be added to ethylene glycol antifreeze to make it unpalatable for animals and children. While other states have considered similar laws, potential costs to the industry and other legislative priorities may have both played a role in pushing the issue to the back burner and preventing passage of the legislation.

Until a federal antifreeze bittering bill becomes law, it's up to concerned citizens and animal lovers to keep even the most curious critters out from under antifreeze's sweet—but deadly—spell.



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Adapted from material originally developed by applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado.

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